



S & W LIQUORS

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS & STILL FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT

BY TEDDY DURGIN

Some journalists are just fated to write certain articles. September 2020 will mark my 50th year on this planet. August 2020 marked S & W Liquors' 50th year in business. A random assignment? Or ... destiny? I'm going with the latter.

Kevin Shifflett is the third-generation owner and operator of the Temple Hills store that has been in his family since the late summer of 1970. "I've been here my entire life," he said, during a recent interview with the *Beverage Journal*.

For Shifflett, customer service has always been the top priority. "When people have a wedding or big get-together, we always do big bulk buy purchases for them and give them discounts on whatever they need. We put together a good list and try and stay within their ballpark of what they're willing to spend."

While there have been fewer such large gatherings in 2020 due to the coronavirus, S & W Liquors has still posted impressive sales numbers. But it hasn't been

easy at times. Shifflett stated, "The pandemic has been a blessing and a curse. Of course, everyone knows how liquor sales have grown. For us, it's been very, very busy especially in that peak April, May, June timeframe. And it's still going pretty strong for us."

He continued, "The problem has been the liquor companies have SO many out of stocks! For instance, Mike's Hard Lemonade -- I haven't been able to buy any of that now in almost a month! We also had a problem with Modelo, which is a huge brand. At least at my store, tequila has been the No. 1 growth category throughout all this. I can't keep the high-end tequilas in stock. Don Julio 1942 is normally \$130 or \$140 a bottle. I got one

case of it in here last Friday. It lasted me one hour, and it was all gone!"

Like other operators, Shifflett has made the necessary physical changes to his establishment to stay in business. "We've installed Plexiglas on both sides of the store," he noted. "Everyone has to wear masks. It's a pain, but we do it. We also have social distancing stickers on the floor to tell everybody to stay six feet apart when they're in line. There's also hand sanitizer by every one of my credit card machines."

S & W Liquors is located next door to a Giant Food supermarket. Consequently, one of the big battles Shifflett got involved in last year was defeating legislation that would have allowed grocery stores and big-box retailers to sell beer and wine. "I wouldn't say I attended every single time there was a hearing," he remarked, "but I was there for probably 90 percent of them. We weren't really able to speak. But when I was at the hearing, I let myself be known. The last

one was in Annapolis. At that particular event, Blaise Miller of BK Miller's was able to speak and he actually used my store as a prime example when he was up there talking to the delegates. Because we're near a Giant, I was all for whatever I needed to do to help protest the legislation. It would have been a devastating blow to me!"

"I'm not a huge store" Shifflett continued. "We're only about 2,600 square feet. There are some bad liquor stores out there that don't do what they're supposed to do. But we keep a clean store and we have done a lot for our employees and customers. Throughout our 50 years, my family has been donating to the community – little leagues and churches. We have 17 employees, 2 just recently hired. Most of them have been with me for 15+ years."

Shifflett [sighing] said "This will probably come back up again in January." And if and when it does, he takes comfort in the fact that he will be fighting alongside the Maryland State Licensed Beverage Association (MSLBA) on the issue. "The MSLBA keeps me informed," he said, "with e-mails on all of the hearings and events. The association fights for us, it's a fantastic organization, and I pay my dues every year to be a part of it." ■



Are You a Member of MSLBA, Maryland State Licensed Beverage Association?

MSLBA members are Maryland beer, wine & spirits retailers representing bars, clubs, restaurants & stores on alcohol beverage issues. They know their best chance for competently and successfully dealing with external forces such as legislation, regulation, suppliers, enforcement agencies, prohibition efforts, and unfair competition, is by joining MSLBA with other independent retailers for reputable representation.



Message from Kevin Shifflett of S & W Liquors:

"The association [MSLBA] fights for us, it's a fantastic organization!"

MSLBA—Representing Alcohol Beverage Licensees since 1950

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